

A report card on adolescents from UNICEF

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In a Comment with *The Lancet* Series on Adolescent Health, Dr Tessa Wardlaw, Chief of Statistics and Monitoring, UNICEF, New York, USA, and colleagues discuss the forthcoming UNICEF publication *Progress for Children: A Report Card on Adolescents*.

They say: "The successes achieved in [child survival](#) in recent years mean that more children have moved into older [age groups](#). Yet too little attention and too few resources are devoted to issues facing older children. Historically, there has also been a serious shortage of data and analyses on [adolescents](#)—a key barrier to understanding this group and their needs, and to identifying appropriate programmes to improve their lives."

The report covers a wide range of health indicators in adolescents. One telling aspect is that adolescents, particularly girls, are often forced to abandon their childhoods and take on adult roles before they are physically ready. Early marriage is a common experience for many girls and raises the likelihood of early childbearing. More than a third of young women aged 20 - 24 years in developing countries, excluding China, were married or in a union by the age of 18 years, and more than one in ten were married before they reached the age of 15 years. Despite a decline in the overall birth rate in developing countries, adolescent birth rates remain relatively high, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In Niger, for instance, half of young women aged 20 – 24 years gave birth before age 18.

The authors conclude: "It is our hope that the rich base of statistical

data and evidence presented in Progress for Children: A Report Card on Adolescents will greatly contribute to making adolescents more visible within a child rights agenda. Indeed, a lasting change in the lives of children and young people needs investments in both the first and second decades of their lives to ensure that adolescents have the abilities, skills, values, and experiences to negotiate multiple life domains, become economically independent, protect themselves from exploitation and abuse, mitigate risk, and participate positively in their families and communities. Only then will the promise of the Millennium Declaration be fulfilled for children, including adolescents, the world over."

Provided by Lancet

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